



Testimony before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB836 - Maryland Native Plants Program
Favorable with Amendments

March 2, 2023

Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for considering the important issue of supporting the Maryland Native Plants Program. University of Maryland Extension (UME) provides applied research, education, and assistance for Maryland and its people in agriculture, youth development, public health, and natural resources. Our expert faculty and staff engage hundreds of thousands of residents per year, delivering programs in person and online in all 23 counties and Baltimore City.

I would like to share information regarding the increased interest in native plants in Maryland as well as the increased demand this is placing on UME commercial and residential Extension horticultural experts. The input I share comes from Extension colleagues and administrators with extensive experience supporting our residential and commercial horticulture stakeholders.

The data and information to support this testimony comes from several sources. One is from one of our statewide flagship effort known as the Home and Garden Information Center (HGIC). The Center's website received over 3.3 million unique page views in 2022. Faculty and staff with the Center and throughout the state answered over 6,600 web-based questions from the public on home horticulture and other topics. The HGIC website witnessed a 90% increase in unique page views related to native plants between 2021 and 2022. Consumers sought planting and maintenance recommendations for native gardens and meadows and how to manage pest, disease, and abiotic problems. UME county-based Extension offices have seen increased requests for information and educational materials on native plants.

UME commercial horticulture faculty have seen increased requests for native plant consultations from commercial greenhouses and nurseries too. This bill requires UME to teach growers techniques for growing native plants for the Maryland commercial horticulture industry and other stakeholders. UME has a long history of conducting applied research and providing educational programming for Maryland's nursery, landscape, greenhouse, arboriculture and supporting industries.

UME currently cooperates with MDA on programs in nutrient management, pesticide applicator training, seafood safety and promotion, and crop promotion. MDA and UME have a good working relationship in these areas and we would expect the same in native plants.

The proposed Maryland Native Plant Program highlight the need for funding to increase UME capacity to support Maryland's residential and commercial native plant stakeholders. UME does not currently have a native plant specialist to manage the bill's proposed requirements of Extension.

We're working closely with the sponsors of this bill and the cross-file in order to ensure Extension can provide support and expertise that aligns with our mission and also ensures the Maryland Department of Agriculture and Extension are working together on this important initiative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on the increase in native plant interest that UME has witnessed from our residents and commercial grower industry. Funding to assist native plants adoption will benefit our environment, our economy, and our society.